

## COMMENTARIES OF THE DUBNO MAGGID

### PARASHAS NOACH

When Hashem commanded Noach to build the ark, He told him to make it with קנים – compartments (Bereishis 6:14). The Midrash remarks (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:9): “Just as a nest (קן) purifies a *metzora* [this refers to the two birds a *metzora* brings as part of his purification process], so, too, your ark will purify you.” What drove our Sages to interpret the word קנים in a sense so different from its plain meaning?

The Maggid explains as follows. It is clear that Noach and the animals were saved by sheer miracle, with natural processes playing no role whatsoever. Another Midrash about Noach, which Rashi quotes, brings out this fact (*Bereishis Rabbah* 31:12): “You were a [mere] carpenter – if not for the covenant I made with you, you would not [even] have been able to enter the ark. Thus it is written (Bereishis 6:18): ‘And I shall establish My covenant with you.’ When? When you enter the ark [as the verse continues: ‘and you shall enter the ark’].” [The commentaries on this Midrash explain that under the usual scheme of nature, Noach would not even have been able to enter the ark, for he would have been torn to bits by marauders and wild animals.] Thus, we might well ask why Hashem made Noach go through the trouble of making the ark – for even after he did so, a miracle was necessary to save him. Hashem could easily have saved Noach from the flood through miracle alone, without the ark.

It appears that the only reason Hashem told Noach to make the ark was to give him a chance to earn merit. The Midrash says that Noach deserved to perish in the flood along with the rest of the world, but he found favor in Hashem’s eyes (*Bereishis Rabbah* 28:9 on Bereishis 7–8). He did not have enough good deeds to his credit to deserve to be saved. Only by carrying out Hashem’s command to build the ark did he become worthy. In this connection, the Torah relates (Bereishis 6:22): “And Noach acted in accordance with everything that Hashem commanded him – thus did he do.” That is, Noach’s intent in building the ark was not to save himself, but rather simply to do as Hashem had commanded him. Thus, the Torah continues (ibid. 7:1): “And the Hashem said to Noach, ‘Come over to the ark – you and all your household – for I have seen you as being righteous before Me in this generation.’” Noach made himself into a righteous man by fulfilling Hashem’s command faithfully.

We can now understand the Midrash we quoted at the outset. On the surface, this Midrash appears to interpret the word קנים in a sense very different from its plain meaning, but we can explain the Midrash in a way that fits with the plain meaning of the verse. The Midrash seeks to explain why Hashem made Noach go to the trouble of making a separate “nesting place” for each animal species. It is no answer to say that the purpose was to keep the animals from harming each other. Hashem could have accomplished that through a miracle, just as He kept the fruits from rotting, and just as He led all the animals and birds to come to the ark on their own in the numbers that He had specified (cf. Rashi on Bereishis 6:18 and 7:9). The Midrash answers by saying that just as a nest (קן) purifies a *metzora*, so, too, the work of building the ark purified Noach. Throughout the process of building the ark, Noach was like a person learning Torah and fulfilling its commandments. Hashem gave Noach detailed instructions regarding each and every aspect of the ark’s construction. The building of the ark thus became a laborious project. Hashem arranged matters in this way so that the work of building the ark would elevate Noach and make him worthy of being saved.